

Life: Victorious faith

August 4, 2014

- *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Aug. 17 focuses on 1 Peter 5:6-11.*

The Texas Rangers had a great season in 2010. It was the first time they had won the American League pennant. They went on to play in their first World Series, losing the title to the San Francisco Giants in the fifth game. The 2011 season was pretty amazing as well. Another pennant win and World Series appearance. Yes, they lost to the St. Louis Cardinals, but it was another great season.

It was fun being a fan in 2010-2011. Who doesn't love being associated with a winning team? Fast forward to 2014. The Rangers are the worst team in baseball as this is being written. It is a little harder to be a jubilant fan when they aren't doing so well.

Sometimes we treat our walk with Christ like a baseball season. When things are going well, we're enthusiastic. When we think Christianity is "winning," we are glad to be called a follower of Christ. But let persecution, ridicule and suffering come, and faith can take a beating.

Humble yourself

How does one stand strong when things get hard? Psychologists tell us there are usually two responses—fight or flight. Neither will do for those who follow Jesus.

Peter used both of those responses the night Jesus was arrested. When the soldiers came to the garden of Gethsemane to arrest his master, he grabbed a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, because those who fight by the sword will die by the sword.

During Jesus' trial, Peter chose the flight method. When asked if he knew Jesus, he denied Christ three times. He then fled the courtyard and wept bitter tears. That night must have felt like the ultimate losing season.

This is the same man who now tells first-century Christians and us today to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand (1 Peter 5:6).

Humility is acknowledging everything we are and have comes from God. The breath we breathe, the strength to walk, the mind to think, the will to choose, the ability to love. All are gifts from God's gracious hand.

In the face of suffering, we must humble ourselves. We don't suffer because we are good. We suffer because Christ suffered, and we follow him. Left to our own devices, we run from suffering in a heartbeat. Jesus walked straight toward it by dying on the cross for our sakes. He didn't have to do that. But he humbled himself and became obedient to God's will for his life and ultimately ours.

That's why we can cast every anxiety on him. He cares for us like no other. Paul reminds us: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Be alert, self-controlled, strong

Peter also teaches us to be on the watch for a spiritual enemy. Many in his day wanted to silence the voices of those who proclaimed Christ, discredit their witness and destroy the church altogether. That doesn't seem so different from our day. He wisely teaches us to be alert to the tactics of the one who seeks to destroy, to exercise self-control and to stand firm. He compared the enemy to a prowling lion (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Lions tend to hunt in a group to increase their chances of catching

something to eat. Their victims might be sick, young or alone. It is easier to be hunted down when the victim is vulnerable. When we do not care for our souls, distance ourselves from other believers or fail to feed on God's word, we become susceptible to the enemy's strategies.

Alertness coupled with the fruit of the Spirit—self-control—gives us strength to stand. Consider Jesus hanging on the cross. He had been beaten, mocked, lied about and betrayed. What did he do to deserve that? Nothing! Instead of lashing out at those crucifying him, he asked the Father to forgive them because they didn't know what they were doing.

We are to resist the enemy. He will throw all kinds of lies at believers: "God's not really going to take care of you. You have to meet your own needs any way you can." "Christians shouldn't have to suffer. God doesn't care about you." How do you counteract those lies?

Stand firm in your faith. Consider the three elements of faith: A firm conviction about God and his truth; a personal surrender to Christ; and a way of living inspired by that surrender.

Instead of listening to lies, ask God to reveal truth to you. Surrender to the truth God shows you in his word. Allow his word to shape the way you live.

Only for a season

The psalmist wrote, "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). The God of all grace promises us our suffering only will last for a little while. He has called us to his eternal glory. He personally will restore us, make us strong and cause us to be steadfast.

With the Apostle Paul, we declare, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8). Victorious faith is ours

because of the mighty power of Almighty God. His is the winning team.